

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Truro and Penwith College

Date of visit: 18 November 2008

Context

Truro and Penwith College was formed on 1 April 2008 by the merger of the former Truro College with the former Penwith College. Truro College was designated as a Beacon college by the Department for Education and Skills and was one of the first in the country to be awarded Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for its work in care. Truro College opened in 1993 and since then has grown rapidly. In September 1993 the college enrolled 742 full-time students. By the end of the 2007/08 academic year, this had grown to around 3,900 full-time students and around 10,000 part-time learners. The college also has significant higher education (HE) provision with around 800 full-time HE learners and 329 part-time learners studying for degrees and diplomas. The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses to full-time and part-time learners including learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has provision in thirteen of the fifteen subject sector areas (SSAs) and provides work based learning.

Penwith College was much smaller and based in Penzance. It had a narrower curriculum than Truro College, but showed the same pattern of tertiary college provision. In contrast to Truro College, it was less successful. In November 2006, the college was judged to be inadequate at inspection. The college was reinspected in January 2008 and was judged to be satisfactory. In January 2008, the principal of Truro College became the acting principal of Penwith College until the two colleges merged in April 2008. The two colleges have been working together towards merger since September 2007.

At the reinspection of Penwith College in January 2008, the following areas for improvement were identified:

- Low success rates on GCE AS courses
- The insufficient proportion of good or outstanding teaching
- The insufficiently challenging individual target setting for students
- Value for money.

This monitoring visit focused mainly on the areas for improvement at the former Penwith College.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve retention and success rates in level 1 courses for adults and the small number of vocational courses at Truro?	Significant progress
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There is a trend of improving success rates across almost all ages and levels of provision at the former Truro College. In 2008, success rates for 16-18 year-old students at all levels are above or well above the national average. For adults at levels 1 and 2 they are slightly above the national average and at level 3 they are well above.

For almost all student ages and all course levels at the former Penwith College, there was a decline in success rates between 2006 and 2007, in some cases to well below the national average. In 2008, this decline has been reversed and almost all ages and course levels are now at or above the national average. This is especially the case for 16-18 year-old students taking level 3 courses, where the success rate has improved from 8% below the national average to 8% above it.

Success rates on adult provision at level 1 at Truro have improved from 62% in 2006/07 to 71% in 2007/08. This is now around the national average. The main contributors to this improvement have been significant improvements in success rates on information technology courses delivered in the college's Open learning Centre, on some level 1 courses in literacy and numeracy, and on some English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision.

There were four full-time vocational courses identified as causing concern with regard to students' success in the college's self-assessment report for 2006/07. Detailed action plans were produced for these courses and the actions taken have been very effective on three courses, with success rates and value-added improving significantly. The fourth course showed some improvements, but remains an area for concern for the college and continues to be monitored closely.

What progress has been made to improve success rates on AS courses at Penwith?	Significant progress
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Students' performance in their GCE AS levels has shown a very significant improvement in 2008. Overall success rates for AS courses based at Penwith have improved from 65% in 2007 to 78% in 2008. This takes them to 9% above the national average. This is a remarkable and very significant improvement for such an important group of courses at the Penwith Campus. Students' progress on AS courses also has improved very significantly. The value-added measure used by the college, which is a commercial system used in a large number of schools and colleges, shows that in 2008 students' progress improved significantly from their 2007 performance and judged the college's new position to be outstanding. There

are a very small number of subjects that still have lower success rates and value-added.

Quality of provision

How is the teaching and learning observation programme, linked to staff development, helping to raise the standards of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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A cycle of formal lesson observations has taken place since the merger and the next cycle is planned for the spring term. All new and probationary teachers are observed by line managers on their arrival at Penwith. From the formal observation process, common themes of good and less effective practice are identified and staff development is provided across both sites. This complements the common staff development days that are scheduled termly and which enable both course specific (e.g. raising achievement in AS geography) and more general staff development (e.g. safeguarding children) to take place.

Teachers based at Penwith have benefited from being able to share resources and good practice with colleagues from the Truro site. Penwith teachers are now integrated into the course teams across the college. Staff teach at both sites in some areas, which is also helping to raise standards across the whole college. There is an increased emphasis in course evaluations and student surveys on the quality of teaching and learning.

Students speak highly of the support they receive from teachers and also of the high expectations that teachers have of them. Students find most lessons to be sufficiently challenging and they value the help they receive on how to improve from the written comments on their coursework.

What progress has been made to improve target setting for students?	Significant progress
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There is now a coherent and comprehensive system in place for setting targets and for the monitoring of students' progress towards them. Students receive good initial guidance which now includes specific academic guidance. This ensures that students are enrolled on appropriate courses.

Targets are agreed with students early in their programmes and recorded formally on their electronic individual learning plan (ILP). For students following AS-level and A-level courses, these include their minimum target grades. Students on vocational course have a similar system of target grade setting. There is a calendar of formal review dates throughout the academic year. In between these formal reviews, students' performance is monitored rigorously and agreed actions recorded on the

ILPs. Attendance is monitored well and any absences followed up quickly; as a result attendance is good.

Leadership and management

How has the merger improved the overall capacity to improve?	Significant progress
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There are a number of areas where the new college has demonstrated already that it has improved the capacity to improve at the Penwith campus. These include the improvements in students' success rates; the changes and improvements to teaching and learning; improved guidance and support, together with better monitoring of students' attendance and progress; and the improved use of data to measure performance and improve standards.

Since the merger, the college has gained approval for an extensive and exciting building programme. Work has already started. A budget of £30 million has been set aside from a variety of sources. This programme, when complete in 3 years time, will create an innovative educational campus which should provide a superb resource for the whole of west Cornwall.

Have governors and staff at Penwith now received training on safeguarding young people?	Significant progress
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All staff at Truro and Penwith College staff have now received Cornwall local authority Tier 1 training in safeguarding children. Full and refresher Child Abuse Multi-Agency Training (CAMAT) has been undertaken for key guidance staff at both sites. All personnel staff have received "Safer Recruitment" training. Governors have received Tier 1 safeguarding briefings and there are now two governors who are trained to monitor this aspect of the college's activity. They each take responsibility for one campus.